
January 2002 - Injury Prevention Newsletter

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1. **Alaska pilots feel pressured to fly:** According to an Associated Press report on January 22, 2002, pilots for small air carriers in Alaska say they are pressured to fly under unsafe conditions and that companies with crash records have poorer safety practices, according to two recently published studies: one from the Flight Safety Digest in it's November-December 2001 edition (www.flightsafety.org/fsd_home.html) and the other study by Colleen Mondor of Fairbanks which was part of her studies for a master's degree at UAF in 1999. Companies were not the only source of pressure. 73 out of 100 pilots interviewed by Mondor said that passenger pressure can affect their decision-making.
2. **Alaska graded D- by Brady Campaign to Prevent Gun Violence:** In its 5th annual analysis of state laws protecting children from gun violence, the Brady Center to Prevent Gun Violence (www.bradiycampaign.org) gave Alaska a grade of D- because "it has no Child Access Prevention law; allows children to possess firearms at 16; prohibits cities from holding the gun industry accountable for it's negligent conduct; and forces police to let people carry hidden handguns in public". On the positive side, Alaska does have an adequate juvenile sales law. In 1998 (the most recent data available), 16 children and teenagers in Alaska died from gunfire, resulting in a youth firearm death rate 35% higher than the national average.
3. **Troopers aim to raise child-safety awareness:** As reported in the Ketchikan Daily News after a sample of Ketchikan car seats showed none were properly installed, local Alaska State Troopers are struggling to raise awareness of the importance of child-safety seats. Common problems with safety seats included not using a booster seat for 80 pounds or less, and reusing seats that may have been involved in accidents or subject to recall. Sargeant Lonny Piscoya said troopers plan to stop and cite drivers if they see a child riding in a car without a car seat. "We do have a no-tolerance policy," he said.
4. **Guide to the Alaska State Legislative session:** As the gavel announced the beginning of session on January 14th a number of bills regarding injury

prevention and safety were carried over or pre-filed during the Legislature's break. To track bill or resolution status during this session you can log on to www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/start.asp and follow the progress of the legislation. It is best to know the bill or resolution number, however there are search engines which will allow you to look for topics such as: public safety, safety, motor vehicles, weapons, or alcohol. Of interest may be: SB12 and SB13 which pertain to helmet use for children under 16 or HB114 which has to do with inhalant abuse. If you would like to give testimony or provide a "public opinion message" contact your local legislative information office

(www.legis.state.ak.us/infodocs/howlio.pdf) or download a POM form at www.legis.state.ak.us/infodocs/pomform.pdf Now is the time to educate lawmakers about laws which can improve the safety and well being of Alaskans.

5. **Alaska Poison Report:** On September 1, 2001 Alaskan gained access to a new nationwide toll free number for poison control services. A report has been published with statistics for the first quarter. A copy of this report can be found at www.chems.gov/ems_poison_control.htm Please note: **888-426-4435** is the toll-free number for **animal poisonings**. Do not call the regular poison control number.
6. **Unbuckled back seat riders deadly to those in front:** Japanese researchers say when rear seat passengers are unbelted, the risk of dying in a serious crash for those in the front seat jumps fivefold because of the flying bodies that strike their seats from behind. Driver seat belt use in the United States hit 73 percent last year, according to the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety. Every state except New Hampshire has a belt law for adult front seat occupants. But only 13 states and the District of Columbia have extended their seat belt laws to cover rear seat riders. "Not enough people in all positions (in the car) wear their seat belts," says Russ Rader, a spokesman for the Institute. For more information about seat belt use go to the web site for the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety at www.hwysafety.org
7. **Avalanche trauma and closed head injury: adding insult to injury:** Although asphyxiation was the cause of death in most avalanche victims, evidence of closed head injury (CHI) was present in 61% of the cases in a review of all victims killed in avalanches in the state of Utah from 10/1/92 through 4/30/99. The conclusion of the study was that while avalanche-associated CHI may not be sufficient to cause death in many cases, a depressed level of consciousness might render a victim incapable of self-rescue and predispose to asphyxia. Use of helmets could help prevent avalanche-associated CHI. For more information: Sidney Morris Johnson, Department of Surgery, University of Utah School of Medicine, Salt Lake City, UT.
8. **Head trauma may lead to depression/Alzheimer's:** 2 studies were released this month suggesting that head trauma could cause depression and speed up the progression of Alzheimer's. The first study published in the January's Archives of General Psychiatry suggest that the effects of head trauma continue for decades after injury. The study involved 1,718 veterans hospitalized for various ailments during the war and questioned 50 year later. About 11% who had had head injuries said they currently had major depression, compared with 8.5% of those

hospitalized during the war for other reasons. Overall, the lifetime prevalence of major depression was 18.5% in the head-injury group and 13.4% among other veterans. The researchers found similar depression rates in veterans who had received their head injury in combat and in those whose injuries occurred elsewhere. "Thus it is unlikely that post-traumatic stress syndrome would explain the findings", the researchers said. Men with the most severe head injuries (loss of consciousness or amnesia for a day or more) faced higher risk of developing depression than men with the most mild injuries (those who blacked out or had amnesia for less than 30 minutes), the study also found. In the second study published in the January Journal of Neuroscience researchers gave mice mild repetitive concussions comparable to a person "seeing stars" and perhaps even forgetting things for a short period. The mice were then tested over a time period of 2 days, nine and sixteen weeks. "At each point, we saw a dramatic increase of indicators for Alzheimer's disease in the mice that received repetitive head trauma." researchers said.

- 9. National Child Passenger Safety Awareness Week: Feb 10-16, 2002:** SAFE KIDS Coalitions across the nation will be educating families of the importance of properly restraining children **on every car trip**. Press releases will highlight the common excuses parents or caretakers give as the rationale for not protecting children including, "I never thought this would happen." "We were just a few minutes from home." "He was crying and wanted to be held." For more information about child passenger safety you can access the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration at www.nhtsa.dot.gov
- 10. Product recalls and safety information:** The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission tracks injuries or deaths in over 15,000 consumer products. To report a dangerous product or a product-related injury, call CPSC's hotline at 800-638-2772 or CPSC's teletypewriter at 800-638-8270. Other information and product recalls are available on their website: www.cpsc.gov.

This message has been compiled by the Section of Community Health and EMS (CHEMS), Alaska Division of Public Health and sent to subscribers of the AK-Prev and AHELP list-serves. It has also been sent as a "bcc" to others in Alaska including Public Health Centers, SAFE KIDS coalitions, Native Health Organizations, and regional EMS Councils and Coordinators who may be interested and active in injury prevention and health promotion. The purpose is to share resources, breaking news, training opportunities, product recalls, and opinions to help prevent injuries to Alaskans. Feedback and contributions are encouraged. Contributions can be directed to Mary Krom: mary_krom@health.state.ak.us

Link for the AK-Prev and AK-EMSC list serve: http://chems.alaska.gov/ems_list_servers.htm

Link for AHELP list serve: <http://www.auroraweb.com/ahec>